

*The Traditions of the CLERGY destructive
of RELIGION: With an Enquiry into
the Grounds and Reasons of such Tra-
ditions. See Bowyer's answer to three
Bowyer's Tracts p 59. 4 to; & anecdote of Bowyer
p 69 to*

A

72.

S E R M O N

PREACH'D at the

VISITATION

Held at WAKEFIELD in

Y O R K S H I R E,

JUNE 25. 1731.

*This must have been the 6th edition
from the word Sublime p 16. note see
Bowyer p 61. BY*

WILLIAM BOWMAN, M. A.

Vicar of DEWSBURY.

D U B L I N : } In England by
Stephens Anstons

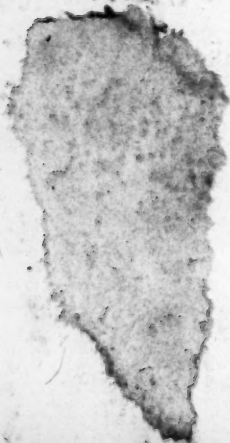
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T H E
P R E F A C E.

A *S* the following Discourse was not originally designed to be published, I think it necessary to inform the World, that it now appears abroad in vindication of itself from the ill-natured Censures and gross Misrepresentations of some of its Reverend Auditors.

Truth has always appeared to me in so amiable a Light, and Prejudice and Bigotry in such dismal and deform'd Colours, that I have long been used to think it my Duty, upon all proper Occasions to endeavour the Advancement of that, and Rooting out of this.

*Erastin. Erastus was a Physician
at Heidelberg, died 1503. He was
Beza's* ^{Opponent} *The P R E F A C E.*

What Success I have had in the present Undertaking, is evident from the almost general Cry that has been raised against me, and the severe Names I have been branded with, for speaking the Dictates of my Conscience with Freedom and Sincerity.

'Tis indeed a hard Case, that Religion should be attended with such deplorable Circumstances, as not to be permitted the Test of Reason, but must be subject to the partial and obstinate Passions of perverse Men. Truth shines always the brighter for being opposed, and if what I have said may seem to cast some shade over it, a candid Exposition from my Reverend Brethren would have been of much more Service, than the + opprobrious Names of Erastin, Heretic, and Apostate. It is always a Presumption of a bad Cause, when foul Language is called in to supply the Place of Argument; and it was pertinently enough said by one upon this Occasion, that Demetrius and the Craftsmen might well be full of Wrath, when their Craft was in Danger to be set at naught.

The Subject of the following Sheets is the Result of an impartial Enquiry into the Nature of a Christian Church, which were designed as the Foundation of a much larger Work, which I purpose God willing, some time

See more of him, Thomas Cravins, in
the note p 91 of Bowyer's Anecdotes
where it is said that for some
The PREFACE. 7 years

time or other to publish: And I profess that ~~neither~~ ^{neither} Interest nor Scepticism, neither O-
stentation nor Ill-nature, but a hearty Love
of Truth, was the Motive that induced me ^{has}
to speak out. ^{been}

Whether what I have said be reasonable ^{a man}
or no, the World must now judge, to me it ap-
pears so; and if I have err'd, 'tis with a ^{for an}
good Conscience, and a Readiness to retract ^{after}
upon sufficient Conviction. I have Reason ^{rejection}
to complain of the Misrepresentations my ^{of all}
Sermon has suffer'd, and how many Things ^{Christi-}
I have been made to say, which I never ^{and dis-}
thought of. A Reverend Brother, who was ^{cipling}
many Miles off when it was deliver'd, has ^{whether}
more than once preach'd his Audience to ^{justly}
Sleep, in confuting Things I never ad- ^{or not}
vanc'd. See Bowyer p 75

All I have to say to this is, that I have ^{seems}
Printed my Discourse faithfully and entire- ^{a que-}
ly, as it was deliver'd from the Pulpit ^{tion}.
without any the least Alteration; chu-
sing rather to trust the Candour of my
Reader with any unguarded Slip that
may be found in it, than undergo the
Charge of a Falsification. I declare so-
lemnly, notwithstanding what has been in-
sinuated by some of my Brethren, that I
esteem and honour Episcopacy as much as any
one, as it is an Apostolical Institution, an
Institution

vi The P R E F A C E.

*Institution excellently adapted to the Circumstances of the Times, and an Institution settled by the Legislature; but as to its being essential to the Church, I think I have Reason to deny. In a Word, as the Church of England by Law established is subject to the King's Supremacy, (whose Power within his Realms of England, Scotland, and Ireland, and all other his Dominions and Countries, is the highest Power under God, to whom all Men, as well Inhabitants, as born within the same, do by God's Laws owe most Loyalty and Obedience, afore and above all other Powers and Potentates in the Earth *) I have nothing to object against those Powers committed by lawful Authority, to her Trust, and shall ever think my self in Conscience obliged to pay all due Reverence to her Dignitaries, and those of her that exercise any Jurisdiction.*

As to what has been hinted, that I have borrow'd some Thoughts from the Independent Whig, and The Rights of the Christian Church; I answer, that 'tis impossible to write upon a Subject of this Nature, without saying many things that have been said before: As to the Books mentioned, I must own there are many Things incomparably

* Can. 1.

The P R E F A C E. vii

well said, and much just and demonstrative Reasoning: And tho' I cannot agree with the general Tenour and Design of those Writers, yet where any Argument has appeared to me just and conclusive, and by Consequence is become my own, 'tis very possible, in treating upon the same Subject, I may have express'd the same Thought. I profess, I have no otherwise made Use of the foremention'd Books, than as the same Thoughts may have occur'd to me naturally, and without a Design of copying. This, I think, will appear to any Judge of writing, from my different Method of handling the same Thoughts, and the Variety of Language in which I have expressed them.

To conclude, what Reception the following Discourse will meet with in the World, I neither know, nor care. I write for no Man's Favour, nor fear anyone's Displeasure: Truth, and the Cause of pure Religion, with me, supersedes all other Considerations; for the sake of which I am content to face an Inquisition, or to starve in a Dungeon, to be destitute, afflicted, tormented, to wander about in Goat-skins, and Sheep-skins, to be flay'd with Scourges, or broken on Racks. Let Ignorance then, or Ill-Nature, rage as horribly as it will, let Censures and Persecution pursue me even to Death, let my Reputation

viii *The* P R E F A C E.

putation descend down to succeeding Generations branded with all the Infamy of Heresy and Miscreancy; yet while I live, there will be something within, will always speak Peace in the midst of a stubborn and perverse World; and beyond the Grave, a GOD that will one Day reward those that have suffer'd for Truth and Righteousness Sake. Thus does it behove a Christian, thus a Minister of the Gospel, to act.



MATTH.



MATTH. XV. 6:

*Thus have ye made the commandment
of God of none effect by your tradi-
tion.*



IT has ever been the unhappy fate of Superstition, that by pretending to too much Religion, It has sapped the Foundation of all Religion; and by being productive of Traditions, that have no being but in a blind mistaken Zeal, it has levell'd the divine Oracles of the most high God, with the weak Opinions of frail Men.

Priestcraft has generally been reputed the Parent of Superstition, and as it is the undoubted Interest, so has it been the great Design of Priests of all Religions, to inculcate this profitable Delusion.

The Clergy of the Church of *Rome* had never risen to that prodigious height of Grandeur and Glory, had not, by their means, Transubstantiation long ago justled Reason out of Doors; and the *Pope's Infallibility*
B been

*Bowyer
p 59*

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been a more incontestible Article of Faith than that *our Saviour died to save sinners*; to deny the Priest's power of *Absolution*, as damnable as *Adultery* or *Incest*, and not to bow to the *Altar*, as *Murder* or *Rebellion*. All their pious Frauds and legendary Tales of Saints and Miracles, were confessedly calculated for this end, to aggrandize the Order of an ambitious Priesthood, and to give them a dazzling Lustre in the Eyes of the Vulgar.

The Paganism of old *Rome* had never kept its Ground, nor its Priests been had in so much Honour and Esteem, but for their well projected Deceit of *Augurs* and *Haruspices*, of the *Sibylls* and *Duumviri*: Their *Dies fasti* and *nefasti*, their *Epulae* and their *Feriae* were of infinite use in the solemn Pageantry; and the removal of the profane Vulgar from their horrid Mysteries continued an awful Deference and Veneration.

The grand Impostor *Mahomet* had now slept undistinguish'd amongst the forgotten ruins of Mortality, and his Religion untalk'd of and unknown had perish'd with him, but for the pretended Visions he saw, and strange Voices he heard in the Cave of *Hira*, and his familiar Converse with the Angel *Gabriel*.

The *Jewish* Doctors had never maintain'd the first Post of Honour and Esteem, but for their diligently inculcating those abominable

Tra-

Destructive of RELIGION. 3

Traditions of their *Elders*, which *Grotius* and *Lightfoot* quote from their *Talmud**

Was Religion indeed nothing but a politick institution, was there neither Revelation nor God in the World, this Procedure had been not only tolerable, but a well-concerted Scheme of future Greatness.

And as long as the World was easy under this Priestly Domination, there was no mighty mischief done; or if a few of the wiser part of Mankind had found out the Cheat, it had probably been buried in their own Breasts, For who that has any Regard to his own Welfare, to his Life or his Possessions, would endeavour to undeceive the World in a Point, in which it is every Man's Interest they should be deceived?

But when we are sure there is a God that *ruleth in the Kingdoms of the Earth*; a God that hath revealed his Will by *many infallible Proofs*; and hath transmitted a perpetual Memorial thereof to us and our Posterity for ever; his Word is to be supposed sufficient to direct our Lives and Conversations, and to guide us, without other Helps, *in the Way that leadeth to eternal Life*. All other Religious Doctrines and Traditions, besides

* *Grot.* in *Matt.* xv. *Light.* *Hor.* H.

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those contained in the Divine Oracles, are the Doctrines of Devils, broach'd on purpose to affront the all-wise Majesty of Heaven, by making him the Author of a Revelation imperfect, and incompetent for the End design'd.

If the Loss or Salvation of our Souls depend upon what God has reveal'd to us in Scripture, as I believe no Christian will deny, then that Revelation must be sufficient of itself for Salvation, or God is *an austere and cruel Master, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strow'd.*

Nothing then can excuse an ambitious Priesthood, who tamper with the Consciences of Men, who preach up Doctrines unknown to the Scriptures, and *make void the Commandment of God by their Tradition*, who have more Regard to their own Greatness, than the Salvation of those to whom they preach, and who prefer their Authority over, to their Care of, the Churches.

What shall be done to *these Watchmen that are blind, greedy Dogs that can never have enough, Shepherds that cannot understand, that all look to their own Way, every one for his Gain from his Quarter?* Can they say, with St. Paul, they are free from the Blood of all Men? Or shall not rather the Blood of
Num.

Destructive of RELIGION. 5

Numbers that have perished thro' their Default, be rigourously required at their Hands?

One would think it needless to enquire, whether the establish'd Church of this Nation laboured under the same Errors? A Church that calls herself pure and reform'd, and her Ministry Orthodox and Apostolical. But alas! 'tis too true, that this our pure and reform'd Church wants yet Purity and Reformation, her Ministry is not so Orthodox and Apostolical as is generally imagined; the Spirit of the old *Harlot* her Mother is not yet forgotten; the primitive Thirst for Grandeur and Ambition reigns sadly triumphant; the Honour of the *holy Function* is to be defended at any Rate, and the *Laity* to be depress'd to harmless Beasts of Burden, the innocent Creatures of Priestcraft.

There are, without dispute, among the Clergy of this Nation, many moderate and brave Men, who make the *Gospel of Christ* the Rule of their Profession, and prefer *the Commandments of God to the Traditions of Men*. But then there are too many of a contrary Strain, haughty and enthusiastic Men, who call themselves, and those of their Order, the *Spiritual Princes of the Earth*, who wrest the Prerogative of God out of his sacred Hands, who juggle Omnipotence out of the World, and substitute themselves in its Place,

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Place, making void the Commandments of God by their Traditions.

I shall therefore in the following Discourse endeavour to shew wherein the Clergy of this Nation oppose their vain and human Traditions, to the Divine Word of God. And this,

First, With Relation to their Mission.
And

Secondly, With Relation to their Authority.

First then, With Relation to their Mission.

13
61.
That there must be some to preach and expound the Word of God, as long as there is a Church and a Religion, seems to me necessary beyond dispute. For while Mankind is a mixt Multitude of Ignorant and Careless, of Men of Business and Men of Pleasure; while there are *Cares of the World, and Deceitfulness of Riches, to choke the good Word of God,* and render it barren and unfruitful; 'tis necessary Mankind should always have a Monitor ready at hand *to preach the Word, to be instant in Season, and out of Season; to reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and Doctrine.* For how shall they hear without a Preacher?

It

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It is as necessary there should be some Form of Government, some kind of Discipline in the Church; for without it there could be no such thing as Unity, which is essential thereto. All the difficulty is, what Rule ought to be observed in the Management of this Affair; which must never be left to every one's private and discretionary Conduct, for then might all be Preachers and no Hearers, all Governours and none to be governed. Some kind of *Mission* is absolutely necessary, for the Sake of Order and to avoid Confusion, for *how shall they preach except they be sent?* 13. 69

I know that as our Church has Tenets and Opinions of her own, with a peculiar Stiffness in this Respect, so to oppose and contradict them, at this Time o' Day, is in her candid Judgment, a kind of *Erastianism* little better than *Heresy*. But regardless of a Name, and for the sake of Truth, I shall however enquire into the Foundation of her Traditions, and endeavour to set this Question in as clear a Light, as the Thing will admit of. See pre face p 18

I think it is evident beyond all Dispute, both from Scripture and the earliest Writings of the Church, that the Apostles, after our Saviour's Death, by Authority committed to them, constituted an Order of Men, to govern and take Care of the Church, and to ordain inferior Ministers in every Place.

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It is no less evident, that this Order has been continued down in a long uninterrupted Succession to the present Time, and in all Probability may be continued down till Time shall be no more.

From this *Apostolical Institution*, our Clergy, desirous to persuade the World that they have something in them of so divine a Nature, as in an especial Manner distinguishes them from the rest of Mankind, draw this plealant Inference in favour of themselves; viz. that

13 63. *Episcopal Ordination is essential to the Church of Christ, that without it the pure Word of God cannot be preached, nor the Sacraments duly administred, and consequently that there are no true Churches upon Earth, but those of England and Rome.*

Whether these Tenets be consistent with Christian Charity or no, that Charity which believeth all Things, hopeth all Things, that Charity which judgeth not lest it be judged, I shall not now enquire. I shall just observe by the way, that in a Church, reform'd and established by Law as ours is, under the Episcopal Oeconomy. 'tis an Institution absolutely necessary for the Call of such as are to be set apart for the Administration of sacred things, an Institution laudable and excellent in it self, and admirably adapted for the Conservation of Peace, Decency, and Order. But that 'tis essential

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essential to a Christian Church is not so easily granted.

If Episcopal Ordination be an essential Call to the Ministry of the Gospel; it must be so upon one of the following Accounts. Either

1. As it was instituted by the Apostles for a positive and perpetual Ordinance. Or,
2. As it conveys to those, upon whom it is conferr'd, some necessary Requisite for the Work of the Gospel.

As to the first, That it was instituted by the Apostles for a positive and perpetual Ordinance,

I shall beg leave to observe,

That as whatever is instituted by the Apostles for a positive and perpetual Ordinance, must be a necessary and indispensable Term of Salvation; so 'tis inconsistent with the Goodness of God, to hide and obscure such Ordinances in Darkness and Ambiguities, which are of such vast Importance to the eternal State of all Mankind. As long as our *God is a good and gracious God, full of Mercy and Compassion*; he cannot but make every Thing that concerns the everlasting Happiness of our Souls, clear, obvious, and indisputable. But that this concerning Episcopal Ordination

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nation is not so, I leave its most biggotted Patrons to judge. The present State of the Church of *Scotland*, of the reformed Churches abroad, and of the modern Dissenters in *England* is an incontestable Evidence of this. 'Tis indeed a reasonable Inference, that because the Apostles instituted this Ordinance, and the Primitive Churches rigorously observ'd it, and consequently that at that Time it was the best and most advantageous Institution for the Church, therefore Circumstances remaining the same, that is, as long as it continues the best apparent Institution, it ought to be inviolably and religiously maintain'd. But to say that because the Apostles instituted an Ordinance, which was the best for the Church at the Time of its Institution, therefore that Ordinance is to be observed even when Circumstances are such that 'tis the worst and most detrimental Ordinance the Church can have, is an Argument only worthy of the *Hickes's* and *Leslies* of the Age.

And as certainly as the Tempers of all Men and Times are not the same, so certainly could not the Apostles design, that an Institution adapted to particular Tempers and Times, should to all Tempers and at all Times ever remain the same.

Besides,

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Besides, from the supposed Perpetuity of this Institution, a Consequence will naturally result, which will overturn the Foundation of all Civil Governments; the Destruction of which, we are sure, the Apostles could never design. For as it implies an entire Independence of the State, and is a discretionary Act of the Bishop, independent too himself (for a divine Institution is not cognizable by the Civil Power) it follows that the Government can exact no legal Security for the Behaviour of the Clergy, but what they themselves are pleased to give; that it can impose no *Oaths*, *Subscriptions*, nor *Declarations* upon them, nor can controul them in the full Exercise of their Function, in what Manner they shall judge convenient: Consequently they are not restrained by any legal Ties, from secret Treason or open Rebellion: No Civil Deprivation can stop their Mouths; their Office and Character extends over all Men, and to all Nations, and submits to no Authority upon Earth.

This is indeed to divide a Kingdom against it self to erect *Imperium in imperio* with a Witness, to reduce Civil Societies into a State of Nature, to refuse *Tribute*, to whom *Tribute is due*, *Custom* to whom *Custom*, *Honour* to whom *Honour*; this is to dispense with every Souls being subject to the higher Powers,

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ers, to lay the Honour of Majesty in the Dust, to *despise Dominions and speak Evil of Dignities.*

I know 'tis a Position of Dean *Hickes* *, That *no Doctrine is to be rejected for the severity of its Consequences.* But to make this Position true, it is necessary that the Doctrine from which such Consequences result should first be proved; for when the pretended Doctrine is uncertain, and equally probable of each side, the Severity of its Consequences is the greatest Presumption against it; but when the Consequences are such, that they absolutely destroy other, even self-evident, Doctrines, that pretended Doctrine must of Course fall to the Ground.

Thus is it, I think, manifest beyond Contradiction that Episcopal Ordination was not instituted by the Apostles for a positive and perpetual Ordinance.

2. The other Reason, why Episcopal Ordination is supposed an Essential Call to the Ministry, is, that it conveys to those upon whom it is conferr'd, some necessary Requisite for the Work of the Ministry.

I know no other Requisite for the Work of the Ministry, than Piety and Learning. The

* *Answer to The Rights of the Christian Church.*

first disposes us to be serious, devout, and conscientious in the Discharge of our Duty; the second stores our Mind with useful Knowledge, furnishes us with Materials to dictate, with Elocution to persuade, and with Examples to propose, but does Episcopal Ordination confer either of these upon us! Does Piety or Learning follow the Imposition of Hands? Does either Ignorance or Immorality flee at the Bishop's Approach. 13. 72.

In the Times of Inspiration indeed and when the working of Miracles was a necessary Qualification for a Minister of Christ, the Apostles, as Men commissioned by the Holy Spirit, by an immediate Communication of the same Spirit, ordained others to succeed them in the Ministry, which could not be supply'd without those extraordinary Helps, 13 71 and Assistances, which were convey'd to them by the Imposition of Hands.

But now that Miracles have fail'd, and Inspiration is no more, what have we to do with extraordinary Helps and Assistances? can we expect the all-wise God to confer an extraordinary Grace for an ordinary, tho' important Work?

Does any of us feel any other Motions of the Spirit than a serious, and devout Thoughtfulness, for the Work we have undertaken, which is indeed (as all other good Thoughts are)

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are) the ordinary operations of the Holy Spirit? Do any of us mean any other Motion when we profess ourselves moved by the Holy Ghost at our Ordination? Do we not still find our selves Men of like Passions with our *Lay-Brethren*, subject to all the Frailties and Infirmities of human Nature?

Nor do I apprehend, that that Promise of our Lord to his Apostles, *Lo I am with you always even unto the end of the World**, implies any extraordinary Assistances to be given to the Ministers of the Gospel, or any particular Call to the Ministry; but only, that wherever *two or three are gathered together in our Saviour's Name, there is he in the midst of them.*

Thus does Episcopal Ordination convey nothing to those upon whom 'tis conferr'd as a Requisite for the Work of the Ministry.

So that from what has been said, we may, without any Absurdity, conclude, that tho' Episcopal Ordination be an excellent Institution, 'tis no divine Ordinance, nor essentially necessary to the Christian Church. I know it will be objected that I have the whole Authority of the Primitive Fathers against me,

* Matth. xxviii. 20.

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who always speak of Episcopacy as of a Divine Ordinance, of perpetual Obligation.

But I shall take very little Pains to confute an Objection, drawn from the Sayings of Persons, in Favour of an Oeconomy they lived under. 'Tis natural for all People to like their own Constitution best, and to speak of it in the most pompous Manner. Besides why might not they be bias'd by the same pleasing Temptations of Honour and Grandeur, that we are? Why might not they err, out of too furious a Zeal, as some of us have done? But what if most of those Sayings we quote with so much Triumph, should imply no such Thing as the perpetual Duration of Episcopacy; and no more than that Episcopacy was the settled Oeconomy of the Church at that Time?

I do not know a more sanguine Expression than that of St Ignatius, *Let no one meddle with any Thing, tho' ever so convenient for the Church without the Bishop* *. Suppose this, if you please, to be a Prohibition, that no one take upon himself the Office of a Minister, tho' his Ministry be ever so necessary for the Church, without the Bishop's Ordina-

See
Boioyer
p 60

* Μηδεις χωρις τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς τι ποιῶν τῶ τῶν ἀνηκόντων εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν. Ig. Ep. ad Smyr. Cap. viii.

tion :

*Let no one meddle do
anything belonging to the Church
without the consent of the Bishop.*

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tion : What can it imply but that Episcopal Ordination was at that Time the settled means of *sending Labourers into Christ's Vineyard?*

I know nothing more is implied in that Saying of St. Cyprian *, *Farewel Episcopacy, and the sublime and divine Power of governing the Church.* And I could shew the same of most of the other Expressions that have been quoted to this purpose, would Time permit, or were it necessary.

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75 To have done then with this Head ; what I have before said with relation to Episcopacy, is supported and confirm'd by the known Laws and Statutes of the Realm ; and by our own Oaths and Subscriptions, who have over and over acknowledged the *King's Majesty in all Causes and over all Persons, Ecclesiastical and Civil, to be supreme Governour.* The Proceedings of the Legislature imply an absolute Power to appoint what Rules and Orders in the Church they shall judge most convenient. Such is Episcopal Ordination at this Day ; necessary indeed, but only as 'tis the best apparent Institution and the Will of the Legislature.

* *Actum est de Episcopatus Vigore, & de Ecclesia gubernanda sublimi & divina Potestate.* Ep. ad Corn. 59.

Destructive of Religion. 17

I come now

Secondly, To shew wherein the Clergy oppose their Traditions to the Word of God with Relation to their *Authority*, and that in two Respects, as they claim,

I. A Power of making Laws and Canons.

II. A Power of authoritative Absolution and Excommunication. But

I. As they claim a Power of making Laws and Canons.

In the Infancy of the Church, when Christianity was confin'd to Corners, and Believers were few and inconstant, while the Princes and Emperors of the World continued Pagans and Persecutors, the Heads of the Church had undoubtedly a Power of making such Rules and Laws, as were necessary for Decency and Order, and to confine all, who were admitted into their Society to the strict Observance thereof.

Laws are as necessary for the Church as the State, when therefore the supreme Powers would take no Care about the Church, but only to persecute and annoy it, 'twas necessary

D

some

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some Laws should be made by those, who were set over it in the Lord: This gave Rise to the *ancient Canons and Apostolical Constitutions*, which have long been so famous in the World. But when Kings and Emperors once became Christians, the Church of course began to incorporate with the State, and the Power of making Laws reverted back again to the old Fountain.

To the Clergy indeed was generally left the Management of such Laws, as concern'd the Church; but it was only by Permission from the Civil Power, and in them the Confirmation and Execution still rested.

If indeed the Clergy of any Nation have a Power of making Laws and Canons independent of the Civil Powers, if they can assemble together in Convocation, when and where they think proper, to enquire into Offences and regulate the Church, they are so far from being Subjects, that they are really the *Presidents and Princes* of the Earth; *Kings of temporal Kings*, to whom all Mankind are Subjects. If they can do this, what should hinder them from unthroning Majesty? What should hinder them from making Laws contrary to Laws, and overturning Nations at Pleasure? It is a mere Scholastic Quibble to say, that all their Laws and Canons relate only

only to Spirituals, and that they pretend to no temporal Jurisdiction: For a Sanction of Rewards and Punishments, is essential to every Law; and every external Act, in order to the enforcing a Law, whether it be exclusion from the Communion, a temporary Penance, or a formal Recantation, is as much a temporal Punishment, as Imprisonment or Death. If they say, their Laws are only about the spiritual and everlasting good of those committed to their Care; so, I say, are all Laws whatsoever. And if the Civil Power can make as good Laws for this End, as 'tis possible for the Clergy to do; to assert this Power, is to multiply Causes for a single effect, a monstrous unpolitical Scheme, which in other Cases the Clergy will not allow reasonable. What the Laws of *England* have determined in this Case, I need not mention. But

II. The Clergy claim further a Power of authoritative Absolution and Excommunication.

By authoritative Absolution and Excommunication, the Clergy sometimes mean an absolute Power of admitting into, or excluding from, the Kingdom of Heaven, whom they think proper; at other times a Pow-

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er of admitting them into, or excluding them from their Society upon Earth, in a judicial way.

In this later Case, I have shewed before they have no Authority, but what they derive from the Civil Power; as it appears likewise from the Procedure of all our Ecclesiastical Courts.

As to the former, I shall speak to it, in a few Words.

As God has frequently declar'd in Scripture upon what Conditions Mankind shall be saved or damn'd, it can never be in the Power of any created Being to disappoint his eternal Purposes. Whether the Conditions of Salvation required by God, be performed or no, is known only unto him, and to those assisted by his divine Inspiration. For which reason the Apostles were endued with a Power of remitting and retaining Sins, as declarative of God's just Judgments, by Virtue of their infallible Knowledge. But would short-sighted Men claim this Power, which only appertains to Infallibility? Would he set himself in the Apostle's stead, with all his Ignorance and Infirmities? Nay rather would not he set himself above, not only the Apostles, but even that God himself, *in whom he lives, moves and has his Being*? Would he wrest the Scepter out of the Almighty's Hand, extort

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port his Prerogative from him, and damn or save, whom he has not damn'd or sav'd?

Could the hapless Flocks, committed to the Charge of such, be once made to swallow this horrid Delusion, there is nothing wanting to establish the tyrannical Domination of Rome; our Revenues would soon pour in Millions upon us, and our Authority rise triumphant above the Powers of the Earth.

Would the Clergy be but once so moderate as to mean no more by this than a conditional Absolution and Excommunication, we would not dispute or refuse it. But then of what Use would such a Power in the Church be? Shall not every honest conscientious Christian, who endeavours to walk *worthy of his Calling, with a lively Faith in God's Mercy, and the Merits of his Saviour*, obtain a full Pardon and Forgiveness of his Sins, without the Priest's Absolution: Or shall not the Wicked, without the Thunder of his Excommunication, receive the due Reward of all his Sins.

I shall now beg leave to conclude with a Word or two, by way of Advice.

Notwithstanding what has been before said, the Work of the Ministry is doubtless a great and important Charge, and in the Management of which is required the nicest Care and Caution. We are sent to teach and take care
of

22 *The Traditions of the* CLERGY

of the wandering Flock of Christ, (*and Wo be unto us if we preach not the Gospel:*) but not to aggrandize our selves at their Expence, or grow rich upon the Spoils of Superstition. We are appointed the *Stewards of God's Household*, to give his Servants their *Meat in due Season and Measure*, and if we perform not this Charge as becomes faithful Stewards, our Master has threaten'd *to cut us in Pieces, and to give us our Portion with the Unbelievers.*

Let us then set about the Business, we are appointed to, in good Earnest, not with *Eye-Service*, as pleasers of our selves, but as the *Servants of God*. Let us make the Holy Scriptures, the Rule of all our Actions and Labours in the Lord. Let us beware of those false Doctrines and Traditions that have given so much Offence to Religion. They may serve indeed to create a superstitious Awe in the weak unthinking Part of Mankind, but, with all sober and wise Men they only reflect Scorn and Contempt upon ourselves. They will certainly one Day rise up in terrible Judgment against us, for the *Mischief* we have done with them in the Church, and the Dishonour we have cast upon God. 'Tis this Affectation of Power and Grandeur, has raised us so many Enemies in the World, and gave Occasion to a late attempt upon us, at
the

Destructive of RELIGION. 23

the Thoughts of which we may yet tremble. Would we change this haughty Note in Time, we have yet Friends sufficient left us to stem the Fury of designing Men, and to frustrate all their Endeavours. Would we yet take heed to the Ministry to which we are called, *God, even our own God would give us his Blessing, and happy is that Servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh shall find so doing.* Which, &c.

F I N I S.

23. *Tracts of Religion.*

The Thoughts of which we may yet tremble.
Would we change this happy State in Time,
we may yet find ourself in Time
the same as before, and so the same
all that we have. Would we yet take
heed to the Ministry to which we are called.
God, even our own God would give us his
Blessing, and happy is that Servant, whom
his Lord, would be content to find doing.
Which, &c.

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F I W I 2